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UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000536

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SUBJECT: IT'S FINALLY OFFICIAL--ARIAS IS THE NEXT PRESIDENT

REF: A. SAN JOSE 443

[1](#)B. SAN JOSE 525

[1](#)1. Summary: In a short statement at midday on March 7, Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) Chief Magistrate Oscar Fonseca formally declared Oscar Arias the winner of the February 5, 2006 presidential election. Arias will take office on May 8. Ref A contains biographical information on Arias. End Summary.

[1](#)2. Arias was formally declared President-elect without ceremony after 30 days of manual vote counting in the closest Costa Rican election in decades. The TSE's Fonseca also declared Laura Chinchilla First Vice President, and Kevin Casas Second Vice President. (Note: In Costa Rica, all three run on the same ticket. End Note.) Fonseca listed the final vote count for all 14 candidates in the presidential race. Despite nine workdays spent resolving some 700 complaints of irregularities, the vast majority presented by the second-place Citizen's Action Party (PAC), the final count changed by only two votes in Arias's favor. An additional 33 votes were declared valid, raising the total to 1,623,992 votes cast. Arias's final margin of victory remains a mere 1.12 percent (40.92 percent of the vote for Arias as compared to 39.8 percent for Solis, a difference of only 18,169 votes).

[1](#)3. Arias called a press conference at his campaign headquarters after the announcement. (Note: Called "House of Victory" during the campaign, Arias now calls the building "House of the People". End Note.) Arias congratulated the people of Costa Rica, the media, and the TSE for their roles in reaching a transparent and positive electoral result. Arias stated his belief that Costa Ricans had voted for him due to his record of keeping promises and standing up to the "two superpowers" in the Central American peace process during his first stint in office (1986-1990). While support had come from all age groups and social sectors, Arias said he owed a special debt of gratitude to poor Costa Ricans who had overwhelmingly supported him. Arias also stressed the positive role played by the TSE's magistrates who, according to Arias, managed the difficult process with elegance despite "undue pressure from some sectors." Arias opined that in any other Latin American country, people would have taken to the streets instead of waiting patiently for official results. He credited the media for its effective coverage of the process which, according to Arias, allowed the population to maintain confidence in its transparency. In an effort to strike a conciliatory note, Arias said that he would "build bridges to his opponents." Arias claimed that his outreach efforts would help him define his administration's priorities. Then Arias crisply informed the media that he would announce his cabinet when he was ready to do so and not a day earlier.

[1](#)4. The Vice Presidents-elect reached out to the opposition in their remarks. Chinchilla called for all sectors to join in a national dialogue. She reminded those sectors that had been disruptive during the electoral process that dialogue was the only legitimate way to resolve differences. Speaking to reporters before Arias arrived at the conference, Casas acknowledged the need for extensive dialogue in order to construct the national agenda. Casas also said that his party had "a lot of work to do" in the wake of surprisingly close elections, and he congratulated the people of Costa Rica for their patience and maturity while awaiting the final results.

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